DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 381 CG 021 996

AUTHOR James, William H.
TITLE Developing Prosocial Behavior in the Classroom.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Objectives; *Behavior Change; *Behavior Problems; *Classroom Techniques; Counseling Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; High Risk Students; *Interpersonal Competence; Modeling (Psychology); *Prosocial Behavior; Role Playing; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Structured Learning Approach

ABSTRACT

Teachers with at-risk students in their classrooms find themselves in the position of having to teach social skills as well as academic skills. The teacher of social skills provides the classroom and materials that facilitate the development of responsible social behavior. The Structured Learning Approach is a means to assist teachers with teaching both academic and social skills. The Structured Learning Approach classifies behavior disorders into the categories of aggression, withdrawal, and immaturity. This psychoeducational approach includes the components of modeling, role-playing, performance feedback, and transfer of training. The modeling component consists of people who provide examples of prosocial skills as well as videotapes, audiotapes, films, and filmstrips of the skill to be learned. Role-playing is the means by which the student learns to perform the skills that have been modeled. Performance feedback provides approval, praise, and critical feedback on how well the skill has been performed. Transfer of training is the exposure of the student to other situations such as home, in-class, social settings, and individual situations where the learned skill might be applied. The components of the Structured Learning Approach can lead to sufficient frequency of desired behaviors, and combining these procedures with other approaches would allow a wider application to the development of prosocial behaviors. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
William James
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED311381

CG 021996

DEVELOPING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

William H. James

A prosocial behavior strategy based on the concepts of a structured learning approach is outlined and discussed

INTRODUCTION

Elementary and middle school teachers, counselors, and adminstrators are coming in contact with increasing numbers of at-risk students. These students exhibit some common characteristics which include; (1) behind in grade level,(2) poor academic performance,(3) poor school attendance, (4) detention and suspension, (5) dislike of school, (6) unstable family life, (7) language problems, and (8) health problems. Teachers with at-risk students in their classrooms find themselves in the position of having to teach social skills as well as academic skills.These problems often put the teacher in two related roles; teacher of academic skills and teacher of social skills. In the teacher of academic skills role, the teacher provides the classroom activities and materials conducive to developing and enhancing academic skills, while the teacher of social skills provides the classroom and materials that facilitate the development of responsible social behavior. The Structured Learning Approach (Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, and Klein, 1980) is a suggested means to assist teachers with these two roles

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and to help students in remediating social skill deficiencies.

THREE MAJOR CATEGORIES

The Structured Learning Approach utilizes a three-category classification system for behavior disorders. The categories are; (1) aggression, (2) withdrawal, and (3) immaturity. This approach suggests that these three categories account for a vast amount of behaviors typically included under the term *behavior disorders*.

1.Aggression. There are several theories that have been advanced to explain aggressive behavior. These include a ***biological basis*** for aggression where chemical imbalances, brain injuries and disorders, and drugs and alcohol stimulate socially inappropriate and hostile behavior. Another theory is the ***frustration-aggression hypothesis*** (Dollard,1939) where pain, abuse, insults, and anger lead to aggressive actions. A third explanation of aggression is the ***social learning theory*** which suggests that we learn to be aggressive by observing aggression in others (Bandura,1973).

The following examples of aggressive behavior describe circumstances where other children may turn to modeling undesirable behaviors.

Mark hits John, who has just taken his pencil.

Maria shouts, "You dummy" at her father, who just said that she cannot go outside.

John crumbles up the pieces of a math game that he is unable to figure out.

Susan takes hold of her baby brother's hand and squeezes it until the baby begins to yell.

2.Withdrawal During the school year, significant numbers of students emotionally withdraw from school. One study of college students (Beck and Young, 1978) showed that at any given time, one quarter of the student population is involved in feelings of depression. Life stresses and pressures often make students feel hopelessness and despair. These feelings result in an inability to concentrate on reading, writing, and other school studies. Cognitive thinking needed for school performance is reduced as the mind is preoccupied with feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem. The student who withdraws tends to question personal worth and often suffers a loss of self-esteem. This student withdraws from teachers, peers, and parents because of feelings of rejection by others. In some cases, suicidal ideas and talk,and suicidal threats and attempts are viewed as a way out of a cruel world and feelings that life is worthless. The student who withdraws becomes increasingly sensitive to the words and actions of others and becomes irritable and may strike out at others in anger and hostility.

The following are examples of withdrawal behaviors.

> Linda huddles up in her coat collar, and hides her face as much as possible during school.
>
> Juan sleeps a lot at home and in school and has little energy for schoolwork saying, "Why should I do this work. It is a waste of time. Nobody cares."
>
> Cindy is extremely withdrawn and plays with imaginary friends that take seats in the classroom and for whom there must be room on the playground.

3.Immaturity. Immaturity, the third major class of behavior has been noted in significant numbers of elementary school youngsters. These behaviors represent a persistent set of acts that are not age-appropriate for the child's age and grade level. These behaviors include cognitive, physical, and intellectual acts that are inappropriate in educational and social settings. Examples of these behaviors are; short attention span, daydreaming and lack of self-control, inability to avoid trouble with others, lack of competence, poor concentration, inability to deal with failure, overreacting to the teasing and anger of others, and poor communications skills.

The following examples are indicate of immature types of behaviors.

> Manuel is a rather temperamental younster who cannot seem to concentrate on his reading and constantly laughs and mocks the teacher's instructions.
>
> Carrie is a very active child with a short attention span and fidgets, often leaves her seat, stretches,and wanders around the classroom.
>
> Matthew refuses to participate in group activities and discussions and walks out while class is in progress.

STRUCTURED LEARNING

The psychoeducational approach called structured learning includes four major components;(1) *modeling*, (2) *role-playing*, (3) *performance feedback*, and (4) *transfer of training* (Goldstein et al., 1980). The modeling component consists of people , videotapes, audiotapes, films, and filmstrips of the skill to be learned. Role-playing is the means by which the youngster learns to perform the skills that have been modeled. Performance feedback provides approval, praise, and critical feedback on how well the skill has been performed. Transfer of training is the exposure to the younster of applications of the learned skills to other situations such as home, in-class, social settings, and individual situations where the learned skill might be applied.

1.Modeling. Modeling is learned through imitation, copying, observation, and identification. A wide variety of behaviors can be learned, strengthened, weakened, or eliminated through the use of modeling. A baby models a smile from its caretaker, and the older brother or sister imitates baby's behavior. A child deals with an aggressive home by acting aggressively in school or on the playfield. A student talks to a teacher about a mathematics problem, and another

student models the same behavior and tries the same approach. Whether it is aggressive behavior, prosocial, emotional, verbal, or other behaviors, modeling has a very powerful effect on children. However, there are situational factors that facilitate modeling behavior.

Effective modeling can be facilitated when certain situational factors are present. These include; (1) an extremely knowledgeable and skilled model, (2) a model who has status such as a teacher, sports figure, community leader,or a respected peer, (3) a model who can provide or represent a reward to the student, and (4) a model who is friendly, empathetic, warm and pleasant. Additionally, modeling can be a very significant factor for learning behaviors that are not very desirable in the classroom.Bandura (1973) and his colleagues found that youngsters behave more aggressively when aggressive models are presented to them. A number of studies have shown that children who observe physically and verbally aggressive models behave in similarly aggressive ways in a variety of settings as compared to children not exposed to aggressive behaviors. Modeling can also be used to successfully teach prosocial skills such as creativity, sharing, caring, and cognitive skills for the classroom.

2.Role playing. Role playing has also been an effective means of assisting children to change their behaviors. It is an activity where the student is asked to take on a role, or

behave in ways dictated by the situation. In this activity,attitude or behavioral change can occur. Some research involves the use of attitude or behavior assessments or questionnaires followed by programs designed to change attitudes or behaviors. As with modeling, role playing can be more effective when certain situational factors are present. For example, the role player will more likely change attitude and behavior if; (1) they have the best information available about the role, (2) they have a choice as to whether to take part in role playing or whether they observe others role playing, (3) the role playing is done in a group so that the role player takes ownership of the enacted behavior or attitude, (4) there is room for flexibility or improvisation in the role play, and (5) there is reward, praise, and follow-up on the role play for the individual enacting the role. However, as with modeling, role playing when used alone does not demonstrate lasting behavioral change. Combining modeling and role playing is an improvement as the child knows what to do and a way to do it, but does not know why new behaviors should be tried during and after role playing. This is where *performance feedback* can make a difference.

3.Performance feedback. Performance feedback typically involves providing the student with an assessment of how well she has done with the role play activity. The assessment may be in the form of verbal praise and encoragement, reinforcement in the form of something

tangible such as more free time or, a critical analysis of the role play that involves the reteaching of the role to the student and a repeat of the role play. The suggested emphasis is on praise, approval, and encouragement since this type of positive reinforcement has proven to be a powerful influence on attitude and behavior change in younsters. Thus, some examination of *social reinforcements* is important.

Social reinforcements are defined as any kind of reward coming from another person. These include; (1) *material rewards*, (2) *praise and approval*. Material rewards are necessary for the young child and often may be the only kind of reinforcement to which they will respond.

> Mary's favorite foods are pizza and tacos and she is willing to attend the special pre-teen program designed to assist her with her school classes and her social skills because she knows that the program staff provides an opportunity for the youngsters to cook pizza and tacos one night a week.

Mary receives social praise for helping to cook the pizza. Thus, social reinforcement is paired with material reward or reinforcement, and eventually the material reward may be eliminated while the social reinforcements are retained. For many individuals who complete a task well, a verbal "good job" or a "thank you" is very much appreciated and encourages the individual to continue the good work. However, for younger children and adolescents to be involved in programs designed to promote behavior or attitude change,

it is often necessary to rely heavily on materials, money, or objects paired with social praise and encouragement. It is important that teachers, parents, and friends provide rewards to students and assist them make major strides toward the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that will help them deal with school and life settings. It is also important to realize that there are certain situational factors that impact reinforcement.

Situational factors that should be considered include; (1) *the individual's reinforcement experiences*, (2) *the timing of the reinforcement*, (3) *the conditions of reinforcement*, (4) *the amount of reinforcement*, (5) *the quality of the reinforcement*, (6) *the schedule of desired behavior*, and (7) *the presence of others*.

It has been observed that what may be reinforcing for one child may be not rewarding for another or may even be experienced as punishing. Certain material reinforcers such as food, money, and prizes, have a good likelihood of being effective with children most of the time, but there are exceptions based on the child's experiences.

> Juana's mother forced her to cook at home. Her mother laid on the couch and drank beer and smoked cigarettes while yelling at her daughter to "hurry up and bring the food."

Juana resents cooking at home and felt the same about the cooking class that she

was forced to take in school as an elective course. She was too embarassed to tell the school advisor about her mother, and skips the class regularly or is often late for class. She is doing very poorly in this class and her teacher says that she is failing. In this instance, pairing social reinforcement with the opportunity to cook pizza in the special pre-teen program is regarded as punishment by Juana, and she is withdrawing from all program activities. Thus, *reinforcement experience* can have a powerful impact on attitudes and behavioral responses to certain situations that appear to be desirable for the youngster.

The timing of the reinforcement is very important as it has been observed that attitude and behavior change in enhanced when reinforcement immediately follows the desired change in behavior or attitude. It is possible that the passage of too much time can lead to an weakening of the desired behavior and a strengthening of undesired responses.

> Malik was told that he would receive a special pre-teen program jacket if he completed the school year program, raised his grades, and improved his behavior in school.

Malik did very well in the pre-teen program for the first two months of school as he really wanted a jacket. However, three months into the school year he began to get discouraged about waiting until the end of the school year to receive a jacket. He began to feel that another type of jacket that his friend had was more readily available for

him as he could trade his bike for the jacket. He traded his bike for the jacket. In this instance, the *timing of the material reward* was too long for Malik to wait, and he "tuned out" to discussions about pre-teen program jackets by the staff of the program. Fortunately, there were other rewards that kept Malik interested and involved in the program.

The conditions of reinforcement can have a significant impact on the possibility for behavioral change for the student. In some cases, too many rewards are provided and they are not made contingent on behavioral change as special privileges, field trips, rewards, and special activities are dispensed too frequently. The use of a fixed time schedule is more appropriate in situations where the student has to provide a high frequency of responses. Delayed reinforement versus immediate reward are conditions that should be made clear to students at the beginning of the activities.

In some cases, contracting is an effective way of dealing with school and classroom objectives. Written contracts are very useful for some children as they allow each party to discuss and negotiate behaviors to be improved, and the rewards that are contingent on behavioral change. In the contract, the specific task to be completed is detailed along with the rewards for completion of the task and the assessment and timeline for completion. The contract

requires the signature of the student and the teacher and in some cases a witness may be used as a part of the process. Contracts for younger students may include pictures and words while for older children a standard form may be used very effectively. Thus, by using a contract, the *conditions of the reinforcement* are clearly spelled out for all parties.

The amount of reinforcement is very important and has been mentioned previously. However, the amount and the quality of the reinforcement are closely associated and will be briefly examined.

> Robert loves chocolate cake. The pre-teen program provides chocolate cake once per month. Once Robert finishes his tutorial session, he is allowed to have a piece of cake. He consistently asks for, and receives a second piece, and sometimes a third.

Other rewards have been tried with Robert, but chocolate cake is the most powerful reward for a younster with some serious deficiences in reading performance. The amount of reward is limited to once a month, and the quality of the reinforcement is very high. Although some might disagree on the reward itself, it has been proven to be an effective reinforcer that is given out in controlled *amounts* with attention given to *quality* of the reward.

The schedule of the reinforcement is extremely important and may be paired with partial or intermittent reinforcement. For example, at the end of each class a certain amount of play time may be provided as an incentive for good behavior,

and this may be paired with some play opportunities for a fixed number of responses in class. This may be the completion of a set of mathematics problems with correct answers, paired with the chance to play a mathematics game in class, or to give the student the opportunity to select a game to play. Another option is a variable time schedule where a randomly chosen time or number of correct responses earns a reward. Thus, the schedule of *desired behaviors or reinforcement* can be based on either; (1) a fixed time such as the end of the class period, (2) a fixed rate such as a certain number of correct responses, (3) a variable time that is randomly chosen, (4) a variable rate of responses that are randomly chosen, or (5) any combination of fixed or variable rate schedules.

The presence of others is an important factor in developing prosocial behavior and in the use of reinforcement. With younger children it must be determined if the prescence of other children will facilitate or inhibit the desired behavior. In this regard, the other children may reinforce the desired behavior.

> Mary feels that Donald needs to stop "fooling around" during the pre-teen program and pay attention to the role play. She tells the staff person that "I hate it when he keeps talking and running around the room during role play"

In this instance, Donald loves the attention he gets by constantly misbehaving, talking, yelling, and generally

acting out,while Mary gets very frustrated with his behavior.

Unfortunately, in these kinds of situations, the staff person ends up reinforcing Donald's desire for attention by constantly trying to get him to settle down, while Mary is not rewarded for trying to focus on the role play. If the staff person ignores Donald, then he will continue to command the attention of other children in the room and may get some others to join him in being disruptive. A solution to this problem is to find other options for Donald that are not reinforcing for him. He may be asked either; (1) to sit quietly, (2) to go talk with another staff person in the office, (3) to go to a "time out" room, (4) choose another activity to work on in a separate place, (5) choose to be sent or taken home, or (6) discuss a contract and the appropriate reward for a change in behavior.

Once the other children realize that Mary's behavior is supported and reinforced and Donald's behavior is not acceptable, then it provides them with an opportunity to choose the kinds of behaviors that are more appropriate to the situation. In this regard, performance and learning are facilitated through the careful examination and use of reinforcement and the *presence of others* to assist in the development of prosocial behavior.

4.Transfer of Training. The primary goal of any program to develop prosocial skills goes beyond the role play

activities and reinforcement schedules to real life situations for the students. If appropriate and structured learning has taken place in specific programs for younsters, then the goal is to insure that the learning is transferred to the streets, school, home, and other settings. Thus, a concern is that transfer of training take place, and the following factors relate to the enhancement of transfer of training.

One important factor is *overlearning* or well-practiced behavior. If a behavior is well-practiced, then it has a higher degree of transfer. Another factor is the *similarity of the setting* so that it approximates real-life. The development of prosocial skills can often take place in school or a similar environment so that the application settings may be as similar as possible. Also, several models, trainers, role play actors, can provide enough *variation* so that transfer is enhanced.

SUMMARY

Three categories for classifying behavior disorders-- aggression, withdrawal, and immaturity-- have been examined in detail. The nature of each category, samples of behaviors, and some theoretical perspectives have been presented. Yet, this review is limited to only a cursory review of the categories.

A review of the components of Structured Learning have been outlined including; modeling, role playing, performance

feedback, and transfer of training. The components can lead to sufficient frequency of desired behaviors, and combining these procedures with other approaches would allow a wider application to the development of prosocial behaviors. A truly effective approach to skill development must show that learning takes place beyond the training program and endures in home, school, and community settings.

REFERENCES

Bandura, A. (1973). Aggression: A social learning analysis. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Beck, A.T., and Young, J.E. (1978). College blues. Psychology Today, September, 80-82.

Dollard, J., et. al. (1939). Frustration and aggression. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Goldstein, A.P. et. al. (1980). Skill streaming the adolescent: A structured learning approach to teaching prosocial skills. Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company.

William H. James, PhD, is a program associate at the Center for the Study and Teaching of At-Risk Students, a Division of the Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, College of Education, University of Washington. Address: William H. James, University of Washington---C-STARS, 4725 30th Avenue NE, GG-12. Seattle, Washington 98195.